

# PETERSON'S MAGAZINE.

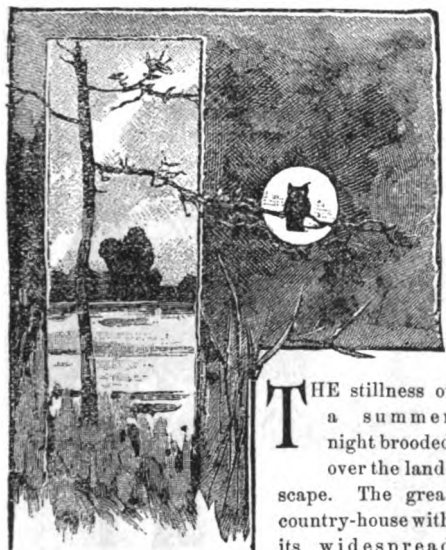
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## DICK MORTON'S MESSENGER.

BY ANNA M. DWIGHT.



THE stillness of a summer night brooded over the landscape. The great country-house with its widespread

grounds seemed wrapped in silence. It was early yet, but the moon was full, and had just risen above the treetops.

One of the long French windows, opening on the balcony which surrounded the mansion, was open, and a young girl stepped out. She looked about her with appreciative pleasure in the beauty of the scene, and then, with a little sigh, she sank into a large wicker rocker, and, leaning back, gazed dreamily off into the west.

"Dear me! How late William is with the mail this evening. He certainly ought to be here by this time." As she spoke, she drew out a tiny gold watch and held it in the moonbeams. "Eight o'clock!" she exclaimed. "How I do wish he would hurry. I will surely have a letter to-night, and, if he isn't here soon, some tiresome people will happen in, and I shall not have time to read it till they have gone," and she frowned a little impatiently as she spoke. Presently, however, her expression

changed, and a smile curved the charming mouth. "Dear old Dick! I wonder what he is doing now. Not enjoying the moonlight, for, let me see, the sun is still high in the heavens in Idaho—it must be nearly five o'clock in Pine Gulch. Perhaps he is thinking about supper, while I am thinking about him! Poor fellow," and she closed her half-audible reflections with a little laugh, ending in a longing sigh.

At that moment, the sound of wheels became audible, and, gazing towards the road, Alice Verney saw the coachman stop the light buggy in front of the great iron gates, and, regardless of dignity, hurried down the long avenue to meet him. He threw the reins over the horse's back, and jumped out, mail-bag in hand.

"Is there anything for me?" was the young lady's eager inquiry.

"Yes, miss," was the answer, and the man gave his burden into her eagerly outstretched hands.

Back to the house she hurried, and, taking the key which she had obtained from her uncle, she unlocked the bag and examined its contents. Sure enough, there were plenty of letters addressed to: "Miss Alice Verney—Larchdale—Rockport—New York," but not one in the handwriting for which she looked. A cloud of disappointment, almost anxiety, came over her face.

"I cannot understand it—I never waited so long for an answer," she murmured, and slowly entered the house to give her uncle his correspondence.

The next morning, when Alice awakened, she felt as if something were wrong—the world out of joint. Then she remembered that she had not received the expected letter from her lover in the far-off Western mining-camp, where he was seeking his fortune. She rose, feeling disturbed but hardly alarmed, and arrayed herself in rather a half-hearted fashion

(515)

for the picnic on which she was to go that morning. She had anticipated a pleasant day, for she was not at all inclined to mope in Dick's absence, but now a cloud seemed cast over everything—even the sky looked gray.

The picnic passed off as picnics usually do. The party were principally neighbors, with the exception of two or three visitors staying in the vicinity, and Alice would have considered it a very uneventful day but for one of these strangers. He was introduced to her by Mrs. Graham as Mr. Reese—a tall, rather good-looking man, with an air and manner which suggested the West. Indeed, that was where he came from.

"Somewhere in Idaho, I believe," said Mrs. Graham, "a place I know very little about. I suppose it is inhabited. Now, Colorado, California, and even New Mexico one hears of, but Idaho! It sounds dreadfully vague—but I suppose he's all right. Will vouches for him—they were at college together."

Alice's heart gave a sudden leap at the familiar name. "Did he know Dick?" Then she thought, how foolish! Idaho was an extensive territory. She smiled a little at her friend's words. Mrs. Graham was unconscious of the interest which the mention of the far-off

locality awoke in the girl's breast. For Alice's engagement had been kept secret, owing to the opposition of her uncle, the nearest relative she possessed. The old gentleman objected to his heiress's marrying a poor man.

The stranger and Miss Verney were a good deal thrown together that day, and he made himself exceedingly agreeable. Though not foolishly vain, nor given to fancying herself the object of men's admiration, Alice could not help thinking that Mr. Reese watched her with unusual interest. It almost rendered her

uncomfortable. Perhaps he had met Dick! But, even in that improbable event, he would scarcely know about her.

That evening, before she went to bed, Alice wrote again to her lover, and anxiously awaited a reply; but none came. A week went by—an interminable week, it seemed to Alice. She had visitors, and went about just as usual. The little town was even gayer than ordinary. Other strangers had arrived in the neighborhood, and dances, picnics, drives, rides, and tennis-matches were the order of the day. No one guessed what Alice suffered, unless she sometimes fancied it might be Mr. Reese. And then she told herself that was absurd! If she



could hide her misery from her nearest and dearest, how could the acquaintance of a week discover it?

To be sure, she felt that she knew him well in some ways, for he was constantly with her whenever possible, and there was a fascination of manner about him which put people quite at their ease. Will Graham declared he was a splendid fellow, and everybody in Rockport accepted him as such.

More than a week after the picnic, Alice received a package from Mr. Reese, with a little

note accompanying it. The brief message was as follows: "I send you these, but I should like to see you as soon as possible. Let me know if I may come."

That was all, but an undefined feeling of apprehension came over her as she read the lines. She hurried up to her room and opened the package. It contained a small but capacious portfolio. She recognized it at once, and her heart almost stood still. Surely it was one she had given to Dick. She opened it with unsteady fingers. It was full of letters. She picked up one and looked at it. A sudden chill came over her. She emptied the contents of the case on the table, and stared at them. Yes—they were her own letters—to Dick.

An hour later, a small boy handed a note to Mr. Reese. It contained the single word: "Come." He went at once; but, when he reached Larchdale, he found visitors on the porch. Among them was Alice. Glancing at her, one would not have known there was anything amiss. She met Mr. Reese with her usual graceful welcome. Suddenly she turned to him.

"Have you ever seen the greenhouses, Mr. Reese?" she asked, carelessly.

"I have never had that pleasure," he replied.

"Shall I show them to you?"

"I should be delighted, if you would," he returned, rising as he spoke.

The rest of the party were comfortably seated, so, as they had all seen the conservatory, they laughingly declined Miss Verney's invitation, and the two set off together. As they passed down the gravel walk, neither spoke. Once within the silent greenness, the girl turned and faced her companion. She was deadly pale, a fearful tenseness in her whole bearing.

"Tell me quickly what you have to say," she cried, in a sharp strained voice. "The gardener is not here—we are quite alone."

"I don't know whether you will ever forgive me," he began, in a low tone. "But I thought perhaps it would be better to hear it from me than anyone else, so I came."

"I—I do not understand. Is—Dick dead?"

The words rang out very clearly on the still air.

"I wish he were," came the answer. "It is worse. He has been false to you. Let me explain. I will try to be as brief as possible. I wish you could sit down," and he glanced about at the brilliant blooms and cool leafage amidst which they stood.

The girl shook her head with a gesture of impatience, and the young man went on:

"We fell in with each other sometime ago, and went together to Pine Gulch. We have been friends and partners ever since. He told me about you. When—when he heard I was coming East, he begged me to take you those—letters—he said he could not write—he had the grace to be ashamed of himself."

She stopped him with an imperious movement.

"Don't," she whispered.

"Forgive me—but if you only knew how it makes me feel—I who, though I have no right—worship you."

His voice sank as he spoke the last words, and Alice did not hear them. She failed to see his glance—her eyes were fixed on the western sky.

"Are you sure there is no mistake?" Alice asked, in a tone of dull despair. Then she went on: "I don't think I quite understand yet. Do you mean he is in love with someone else?"

The man bent his head in silent assent, as if it pained him too much to speak. Finally he said gently:

"Shall I tell you all about it—how he—" the speaker stopped.

"No. It does not matter," came the reply, in a hard cold voice.

"At least, you forgive me for telling you—you cannot guess how hard it was for me—" again he paused.

"You have been very kind," she answered, in the same tone, holding out her hand as she spoke.

He clasped the slender fingers tenderly, but she half turned and hid her face in her handkerchief—not because there were tears in her eyes, but as if to shut out an unpleasant sight.

"Forgive me," she whispered. "Indeed I do not blame you—I shall soon get over this, but just now I—will you pardon my not wanting to see you?"

"I understand," he returned, sadly. "Good-bye; I will go up to the house and make my excuses and adieux."

A moment afterward, Alice was alone with her misery.

Two days later, Henry Reese was whirling toward Chicago in the limited express. He had not seen Miss Verney since the day in the conservatory, though, in answer to a note, he had received a thick packet from her. His manner was somewhat altered since that—to Alice—dreadful morning. He wore an air of complacency and self-satisfaction as if he had done his whole duty.

The engine slowed up in the station at

Chicago, and he glanced carelessly about. Suddenly his face changed—he gave a violent start as he caught sight of a pale haggard individual coming with invalid's tread through the gate. When the train stopped, Reese sprang out and hurried up to the sick man.

"Dick!" he cried.

The other looked at him, a strange mingling of doubt and joy in his face.

"My dear boy! Thank God you are alive," Reese went on, rapidly. "I was afraid I should find you gone. Did you understand? Did you doubt me? Oh, how I hated to leave you alone in that wretched camp, with only those miserable miners and coolies."

The two men had clasped hands, and, as the elder spoke, the doubt on the invalid's face vanished, leaving only the joy.

"I was afraid they would murder you in my absence," Reese said.

"No, they only robbed me," was the bitter rejoinder.

"Fiends!" exclaimed the other; but his friend did not see the strange look of relief which came into the listener's face.

"Tell me—Alice—where is she?" came next, the eager question.

"Wait," answered Mr. Reese, slipping his arm in that of the trembling speaker, and drawing him out of the station. "I will tell you all about her when we reach the hotel. She is well, though."

"Tell me now," cried the sick man, impatiently, his pale face flushing; but his companion's only answer was to hurry him up the hotel steps.

Five minutes later, Dick Morton had flung himself on a chair, and was listening to his friend's story. When it was ended, the poor fellow, exhausted by his recent illness, long journey, and this latest blow, laid his head on his arms in utter despair. While speaking, Henry Reese's face wore an expression of deepest pain, although he had assumed, as men often do when greatly moved, his most careless attitude, and was resting one knee on a chair, his hand in his pocket.

At last, Morton lifted his head.

"I was going East," he said, wearily. "Now it is of no use. I will turn back."

A few weeks passed. Mr. Reese returned to Rockport, and once more was in constant attendance on Miss Verney. She tried to overcome her repugnance to him, but only succeeded in concealing it. One day in October, they found themselves alone in the greenhouse, the rest of the party having passed out.

"Wait a moment," he cried, eagerly, laying a detaining touch on Alice's arm. "I must speak—I have waited—tried to be patient, but I have loved you since I first saw you. Tell me, is there no hope?"

She gazed at him sadly, and answered:

"None whatever."

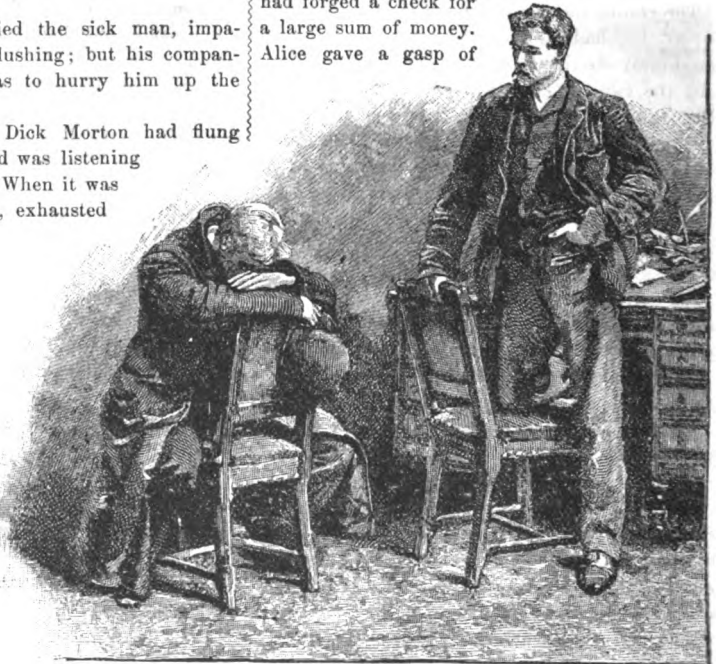
"I will wait twenty years if you will only promise to try—to forget—"

Alice interrupted him.

"It is no use," she said, gently but decidedly.

"I know. Perhaps it is a humiliating confession to make, but, if I live to be a thousand, I shall never care for anyone again. Please remember, my decision is final."

By noon the next day, Henry Reese had gone, and, by the close of the week, the little village was full of excitement. Will Graham had received positive information that his quondam college-mate was an unprincipled scoundrel—he had forged a check for a large sum of money. Alice gave a gasp of







horror when she first heard the news, then a sudden wild hope awoke in her heart.

"He must have deceived me about Dick," she told herself, over and over again.

As soon as she could think clearly, she decided what to do. She went straight to her uncle and told him the whole story.

"I am going West to find Dick," she said.

"I know he is true to me—I was mad, to doubt it."

Looking at her, Mr. Verney saw it was useless to oppose her, so, in company with an invalid friend who was glad of the trip, Alice started out, like Evangeline, to find her lover. After many months of wandering, spring found them

in a large hotel in one of Colorado's numerous health-resorts.

Soon after their arrival, Alice went into the balcony. At the farther end, a young man sat on a low seat. His head was half turned toward the west, where the gorgeous sunset lingered on the highest peaks, though the plains to the east lay in shadow. Something familiar in the figure stirred Alice's pulse. She hurried forward. He turned. She gave a low cry:

"Dick!"

"Alice!"

Then there was silence.

"Are you still Miss Verney?" asked the young man, rising, with an air of elaborate politeness.

A deep flush rose in Alice's cheek.

"Yes," she answered, gently, "I have never changed."

Dick sprang eagerly nearer.

"Tell me, what do you mean?" he cried.

"Surely, when you sent my letters back with the message that you loved—someone else—"

"I sent no such word," she broke in. "And you returned mine first."

Dick had been pale before—but he grew paler now.

"Never! I never sent your letters back. I have always loved you," he ended, sadly.

Alice's whole face lit up as she spoke:

"It must have been treachery on that man's part. I do not understand, but—he brought me my letters, and said you wanted me to set you free. Of course, I did so—"

Dick waited for nothing more, but, with a glad cry, held out his arms, and, for the first time in long dreary months, folded his betrothed to his heart. When he released her, she gently pushed him into the chair, saying tenderly:

"Dearest, you are not able to stand. You must sit there. Tell me, have you been ill?"

"Yes, but I shall soon be well now. Your face will effect a speedy cure." His countenance wore an expression of perplexed thought. He was trying to comprehend the mystery of their separation. At length he spoke: "Reese must have been false to me," he said, with sad conviction, "though I do not understand why. You see, we fell in with each other on our way to Pine Gulch, and, as we were about the only two decent men in the handful who had started the camp, we concluded to join forces. I thought the world of him. Then I was taken ill. Some-time during the first few days, I told him all about you, and made him promise if I got very

bad he would send for you. I gave him your address. Well, for several weeks, I was delirious. When I came to my senses, I found myself alone. When I was able to crawl about, I discovered that all my valuables, among them your letters, had disappeared. There was a note from Henry, saying he had started to find you."

"Oh, what treachery!" murmured Alice.

Dick sighed and went on:

"You see, I didn't know how much time had passed, and, of course, I thought the other fellows had robbed me. As soon as I could stand on my feet, I started eastward. In Chicago, I met Reese. He explained to me how he lost your address—hunted until he had found you, and finally showed me my letters and gave me that cruel message. I believed in him implicitly."

Then Alice told him her story, as she leaned against the vine-wreathed railing and looked down into her lover's pale happy face.

Dick's health had been terribly shattered by his terrible illness and the shock received while still only half-recovered. He had been traveling about in search of health, and he had found it, indeed, when he found Alice.

On their return to Rockport, a letter awaited her from Reese, in prison for forgery. It said:

"I loved you from the moment Dick showed me your picture. And then—I may as well confess—he told me you were rich—an heiress, and I needed money. When I saw how ill he was, I conceived the plan of separating you. It succeeded, but I did not gain by it. Perhaps you will find Dick again—I hope so. Maybe then you will forgive me."

And, in the sunshine of happiness which illumines their united lives, Alice can easily forgive the wretched man who claimed to be "DICK MORTON'S MESSENGER."

## MY LADY.

BY ROBERT OGDEN FOWLER.

Her face—no rarest flower that grows

In blossoming fields, so sweet as it!

The color of her fair hair knows

Its likeness in the pale-gold wheat;

Her smiles are all like summer noons,  
And sweet her breath as scented June's.

Her lips are redder than the deep

Warm blood that stirs her gentle veins;

Her voice is music half asleep,

Heard in the sound of happy rains;

Her eyes shine like a wondrous gem

Plucked from some royal diadem.

The summer knows her, and its flowers,

And all the wondering ways thereof;

For her await no darksome hours—

Time follows not the feet of Love,  
Since Love is born of God—but Time!  
What is he save a mortal mime?

Oh, dewy flowers that kissed her feet!

Oh, fields she laughed and lingered in!

Treasure the touches of my sweet;

For, when the summer dawns begin,

I'll bring her to you, 'mid the swells  
Of fields and flowers, of wedding-bells!

## WHY SHE SURRENDERED

BY KATHERINE KEENE.

"COOK, Hanson, Greeley, Livingstone—Pshaw!" came impatiently from the lips of a tall good-looking man, glancing rapidly over the open register at a well-known American banker's in Paris.

"Mrs. Walters—Miss Shirley—" Here he paused; he had evidently found what he was searching for. Taking out a small Russia-leather blank-book, he carefully jotted down the address opposite—37 Avenue d'Antin—then, turning to that day's entries, he wrote in a bold legible hand: "Reginald Loring, New York," and then closed the book with an air of satisfaction and relief. Sauntering into the reading-room, after exchanging nods and a word or so with various men standing about, he took up a "Galignani" and was speedily absorbed in its columns.

He was well built and remarkably well dressed, but with such an air of carelessness that the observer was immediately convinced that it was the result of accident, not of intention. He had an open frank face, but the irregularity of his features forbade the possibility of its being called handsome; in fact, a pair of honest gray eyes were all that redeemed it from absolute plainness.

Just at that moment, he looked at his watch. "Three o'clock," he soliloquized; he rose with a look of determination, and left the room. Once outside, he stopped to light a cigar, and then hailed a passing cab, into which he jumped, and was rapidly whirled over the soft asphalt pavements in the direction of 37 Avenue d'Antin.

It was a sunny April day; the fresh young leaves were just peeping forth, and the birds were twittering on the boughs. All the gay well-dressed Parisian world was out for its afternoon promenade—coquettish nursemaids, picturesque in their Normandy caps and great hoops of gold, were throwing dangerous glances at admiring gendarmes as they tripped along after the troops of children. The carriage-way was blocked with brilliant equipages on their way to the Bois de Boulogne, to see and to be seen.

Loring had been so absorbed in watching the changing crowd, that he had not noticed his quick progress. At that moment, he glanced up. "By Jove," he said, filled with dismay. "A

moment more, and I shall be there, and not an idea in my head! What decently plausible excuse can I give for putting in an appearance? The girl will think it absolute persecution, and I don't know but what she's right; but it's my only chance. Give her time to think, and I'd stake my life she'd say 'No'! Bless her little heart!"

And now a word as to the "not impossible she":

Helen Shirley was a woman of twenty-five, and not pretty as prettiness goes—with beauty of freshness and coloring. It is difficult to describe the fascination of her face, but that it was charming was an acknowledged fact. She had large dark eyes, and a quantity of rippling chestnut hair, beautiful mouth and teeth, and a graceful willowy figure. These were her only claims to beauty. Too few, women thought, to account for the admiration she always received in society.

Of course, the question was often asked: "Why had she not married?" Her obstinate refusal of many good offers furnished an unflinching grievance to her aunt, with whom she had lived since childhood.

The two had been just a month in Europe—and why had they come? "Simply," as Helen told her aunt when proposing the voyage, "because I don't want to think."

"Pshaw," returned Mrs. Walters. "Why don't you tell the truth, and say that you're afraid your hour has come at last, and that, like other women before you, you're in love?"

"I am not in love a particle!" cried Helen. She told the truth, but not the whole truth. The fact of the matter was, she feared she was going to be.

"Well!" went on the other, rapidly, "if you're not, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Here is a charming fellow, well educated, good-looking, rich, and perfectly devoted to you! What on earth are you waiting for?"

"Oh," Helen exclaimed, "this wretchedness of having to decide whether you like a man well enough to marry him—and, if you do, whether you will—a week hence! It renders life a burden."

"So you acknowledge there's a question in your mind?" rejoined her aunt. "In other

words, you're going away to make a decision. Poor fellow! I hope absence will dispose you to be gentle with him."

Reginald Loring was the "him." After a short delay, he had obeyed an uncontrollable impulse and followed the ladies to Paris, where he had only just arrived. Now, it is very evident why all his ideas vanished, as he drove into the courtyard of 37 Avenue d'Antin. A moment's talk with the concierge revealed the fact that madame is at home; the idea of a gentleman inquiring for mademoiselle was too shocking for his French mind to grasp, so he ignored it.

"The third floor, if monsieur will be so obliging."

Monsieur was obliging to that extent, and climbed a number of slippery varnished stairs, until the sight of a visiting-card, "Mrs. B. Walters," fastened above the bell, brought him to a standstill. A quick pull brought a neat little maid—who, looking like the stage sou-brette, with her hands in her apron-pockets, begged monsieur to walk into the salon.

Monsieur complied, his heart sinking within him. A portière was pulled aside, and he was ushered into a pretty room, overflowing with bric-à-brac and bright with flowers and sunshine which streamed in from an open window.

Mrs. Walters was alone and seemingly absorbed in some intricate bit of lacework over which she was bending. On the visitor's entrance, she rose, and, sweeping forward, welcomed him with the most impressive cordiality. Even Bijou, a much-beribboned Skye terrier, was urged with great gravity to come forward and say "How d'ye do?" to Mr. Loring.

"He was looking very well." "And how was his charming mamma?" "Didn't he find the changes in poor dear Paris very, very sad?" "Did he have a quick passage?"

All these—and, it seemed to him, a thousand more—questions were thrown at his head in quick succession. By a powerful concentration of his mental powers, he came out of the ordeal comparatively well. He made an occasional blunder, such as saying that his mother was much improved by the number of new streets which had been cut through, and that Paris had been suffering a good deal lately from her old neuralgic headaches. However, as Mrs. Walters never paused a second in her chatter, for his replies, he did not allow his conversational misfortunes to weigh heavily on his soul.

Half an hour passed. Loring began to feel fidgety. It was certainly very stupid in Mrs. Walters—who, of course, knew that he didn't come for her sake—not even to mention Helen.

At last, his patience became exhausted; seizing an opportunity when Mrs. Walters paused to take breath, he said, with what he flattered himself was an air of sufficient indifference:

"And Miss Helen—I trust she is well. Is she not equal to seeing an old friend, this morning?"

Mrs. Walters gave a little start.

"Sure enough," she said, as if the idea of Helen had just occurred to her. "Where can the child be? Will you ring for Nanette? Or—no, I will go myself." And she vanished through the curtained doorway.

Presently, to Loring's unmitigated horror and surprise, he heard voices—not a properly-modulated murmur, but the voices loud and distinct—of persons a good deal in earnest and saying exactly what they thought. First came Mrs. Walters's tones, suave and persuasive:

"Now, Helen darling, I implore you—do be nice to him; he deserves it, after coming all the way from New York for his answer. Say 'yes' to the poor fellow, and put him out of his misery."

"Or into it," returned Helen, quickly, her voice with the sharp metallic ring it always took when she was irritated. "But won't it be time to answer the question when it's asked?"

"Well, at any rate," said her aunt, pettishly, "I wish you'd make up your mind one way or another—I am heartily bored by the whole affair. Of all stupid objections on the face of the earth, a man in love is certainly the most so. What I've undergone for the last hour, waiting for you to come in! There he sat, glaring at me vacantly, never volunteering a remark, and answering everything I said upside-down, with one eye on the door all the time. Well, you're going at last. I suppose you'd better ask him to dine with us. I'll offer up prayers that he may recover his lost wits by that time."

Then a soft "swish" of skirts, and the luckless eavesdropper knew that Helen was coming toward him, would see the half-open door, and at a glance take in the whole situation.

How terribly awkward for all parties: for Mrs. Walters, to know that she had been caught red-handed, as it were, in the act of vituperating a wretched youth, even then under her roof; for Helen, that she should have been overheard by him discussing the probabilities of his own proposal; and for him—what a downfall to his pride!—who had so plumed himself on his power of being agreeable to any woman, old or young. "Glaring vacantly"—what a very unpleasant phrase that was! Then the ludicrous side of the affair struck him, and he shook with uncontrollable laughter.



Just at this unfortunate moment, in came Helen. As he had foreseen, she instantly knew what had happened, and, like the wise general that she was, immediately arranged her plan of action. She looked as pretty as possible in her closely-fitting velvet dress, with a great bunch of fragrant rosebuds at her belt. Annoyance at this wretched contretemps had brought a bright flush to her cheeks, and, as she stood welcoming him, Loring thought he had never seen her look so lovely.

She sank nonchalantly into a low chair with: "Own yourself converted now, Mr. Loring, to the truth of the old saying 'listeners, etc.'"

"My dear Miss Helen," he answered, laughing, "there was no need for conversion. I always believed in it, but now I shall proclaim its truth from the housetops. Besides, your aunt only told the truth. I confess it sadly, but I haven't a shadow of doubt that I did glare vacantly, and that I did keep one eye on the door."

Helen glanced up doubtfully; but, seeing Loring's solemn countenance, went off into a peal of silvery laughter, but sobered down as if by magic when he resumed:

"And then, Helen dear, you know she was perfectly right, as to what I came to Paris for. I shall not try to say how much I love you, and how happy you would make me, for you know that already. Now tell me, dearest, is it to be 'yes' or 'no'?" Then he sat quietly, looking at her with grave honest eyes.

Helen put up her hands appealingly. "Ah! don't!" she said. "I was so afraid that you would speak this morning, and—I'm—I'm—not ready."

"Not ready?" he repeated, eagerly, grasping at her words. "You mean you don't dare to say 'yes,' and you—" then he took her hand, and looked down at her pretty troubled face—"don't want to say 'no'!"

His touch brought her to herself.

"Exactly so!" she said, quietly. "I am too fond of you to be guilty of the injustice of marrying you without love, and I am selfish enough to dread losing an old friend by saying 'no.' Why do you wish to marry me? Why can't you be satisfied with matters as they stand? Such good friends as we are."

"Good heavens, Helen!" exclaimed he, impetuously. "Haven't I told you that I love you? Do you think me a man to be satisfied with this namby-pambyness? With me, it must be all or nothing! Decide for yourself!"

Helen sat motionless, her color coming and

going, her heart beating faster and faster. What should she do? Her chance for life's happiness might be in her hands; her brain whirled, she could not think.

"Well, which is it?" said Loring's voice, gently, in her ear.

A great longing came over her to put her head down on that broad shoulder, and give up the fight; but she conquered it, and so, disgusted with herself, woman-like, she visited her annoyance on him.

"Ah!" she said, nervously, "how stupid the best of men can be at times! Don't you know that, if you press me in this way, you will make me hate you? Give me time." And then, with a quick change of mood and a mischievous glance: "You ought to be in the seventh heaven that I don't say 'no' on the spot!"

Loring knew then that his opportunity was gone; that, when Helen relapsed into her everyday coquetties, his fate was to play mouse to her ladyship's cat for as long as it should seem good to her.

One last effort, however, he made.

"Helen dear," said he, gravely, bending over her, "will you tell me in a week?"

A shade crossed her bright face, and her lips trembled.

"Yes," she said, affected, in spite of herself, by his gravity. "In a week." And then, like a child who has made up its mind not to be beguiled into any more serious or instructive conversation, she took the reins into her own hands, and his chance was gone.

In a moment, Mrs. Walters came sailing majestically into the room, with such perfect unconsciousness of having said anything at all remarkable, that Loring was threatened with another attack of an hilarious nature. She sat down, and immediately joined in the conversation with such gusto that Helen, glad to have the burden taken off of her shoulders, relapsed into silence. She was very uncomfortable. Without intending it in the least, she had almost engaged herself. Well, why shouldn't she? He was manly, straightforward, and good-looking—here she stole a glance at him through her long eyelashes—rich, and he loved her dearly. Her reverie was broken in upon by Mrs. Walters's turning to her and saying: "I am trying to persuade Mr. Loring to dine with us this evening, but he pleads an engagement."

Helen looked up, and met Loring's eyes brimming over with fun. Mrs. Walters's bland civility was too much for him.

Helen blushed, one of her quick wild-rose

blushes, and, looking away with a sense of shyness very new to her, murmured very indistinctly:

"Won't he borrow a woman's privilege for once, and change his mind?"

But he was not to be persuaded, and, after a few words as to the following day's engagements, took his departure.

Helen stood at the open window, with the soft spring breezes blowing in on her, and saw his straight tall figure walk briskly away. "A week," she thought; "a week's a long time. Of course, I shall know in a week." A horse-chestnut was just bursting into bloom in the gray courtyard outside, its pink and white blossoms making little flecks of color on the high stone walls beyond; a military band, marching by, sent its "tut te tum" floating merrily over the housetops. All was bright and happy, and, strange as it was, it all seemed a little more complete since Loring's arrival.

What glamor is it that the fair enchantress Paris throws over all strangers? Years seem like months under her magic sway, hours like moments. Helen's week was all but gone, only two days remained, and where had it flown? She could remember nothing but a confused jumble of pleasure, like a child's kaleidoscope, bright and glittering in every direction she glanced at it. But one voice, one face, appeared in everything, like the chorus in an opera; would it come in at the last scene? Yes. Helen had decided that, love or not, she now cared for him to such a degree that he had become a necessity to her—a part of her life. Should she tell him so now—this morning? That was the question!

It was raining hard, one of those pitiless chilly rains which, when they invade the sunny capital, make of it an abomination of desolation. People seem to get so pitifully wet there, and trot along in such very light-colored wraps, with such grieved and troubled countenances, and then the drivers of the multitudinous hacks all look so shiny and slippery in their rubber coats, that they cast an additional chill over the scene.

Helen, bewitching in her morning-dress, was sitting in front of a bright fire, warming a pair of very pretty feet on the edge of the grate. Should she tell him or not? A soft flush came over her face as she thought. The little gilt clock on the mantel struck. Helen started. "Two o'clock! Why, that is certainly strange! Reginald was to have been here at one, but probably some stupid visitor's detaining him," and she thought of the visitor, whoever he might be, with great disapproval.

Another half-hour passed, and then it became Reginald's turn to suffer.

"There is no excuse for this," she thought, severely, "nothing should have detained him until this time. When he does make his appearance, I shall certainly tell Nanette to say 'Not at home,'" and she moved toward the door.

Just at this moment, came a sharp and authoritative ring, the sound of heavy feet, and the voices of two or three men, then she heard Nanette in horrified exclamation. Full of curiosity, she walked toward the door. She saw a sergeant of police, and close behind him two other policemen, to whom Nanette was addressing herself with a great deal of importance and gesticulation. On seeing Helen, he removed his hat quickly, and, putting his feet carefully into the first position, made her a profound bow.

"As madame is not at home, they tell me, I may be allowed to ask mademoiselle a few questions."

"Ah! non," put in Nanette, her French sentiment urging her to interpose between the barbarous law and mademoiselle's fiancé, for that, Nanette has decided in her busy little mind, was the position Loring occupied in madame's household.

"Hush instantly, Nanette," commanded Helen, and then, turning to the officer, she said in exquisite French: "What is all this about?"

"Simply, mademoiselle, that, in the name of the law, we demand all information with regard to a certain Mr. Loring."

Helen grew deadly pale, and leaned against the door for support, at which Nanette burst into a fit of theatrical sobbing, wrung her hands tragically, implored mademoiselle "to calm herself."

With a quiet but imperative gesture, Helen at once stilled the girl's outcries, and then, turning to the man, said very calmly:

"I will answer anything you ask me, but tell me first what has happened to him."

"Ah, mademoiselle," he replied, with a shrug, "you ask too much!" and then, with a return to his official manner, he added, gloomily: "We can only hope—nothing. Monsieur has disappeared; the police were notified of the fact at eleven this morning by his valet, who was naturally much alarmed by his absence. Now, mademoiselle, permit me! First, as to the character of this man, Harris by name?" referring to some notes written in spider-like characters on a slip of paper.

Helen, her brain swimming, and feeling that it must be some horrible dream, answered that he was a perfectly reliable and trustworthy servant.

"And now, mademoiselle, excuse me, but the question is of so delicate a nature, had not the servant better withdraw?"

"By no means," answered Helen, haughtily: "you can ask me nothing Nanette may not hear!"

"Very well," replied the official, solemnly. "Had monsieur any reason for committing suicide?" in a ghastly tone, and riveting his eyes on the lady's face.

Helen shivered. Reginald! Suicide! What nonsense! He the picture of life, with everything bright to live for!

"None whatever," she said, steadfastly.

"Mademoiselle speaks as one who should know," the man replied, not impertinently, but gravely, as if stating a fact.

"I do," said Helen, calmly, white to her very lips, "for I am to be his wife if—" As she spoke, the force of that "if" came over her. "Impossible—nothing could have happened to him!" In that second, her whole future life seemed to rise up before her, desolate and wretched. But that man and his dreadful catechism must be answered.

For half an hour she was tortured. "At what time did he leave the house? Where did he express his intention of going? How could he be identified?"

These questions, in every conceivable shape, both Nanette and she answered over and over again. Finally, the officer was satisfied and took his departure, and then Helen went to her room and bolted the door.

What agonies she suffered. At every step, she saw some foolish trifle that reminded her of him. On the window-seat, some sweet-smelling purple violets; on her dressing-table, an absurd little trinket, a souvenir of a gay dinner. How distinctly she recalled his face, as he handed it to her the following morning, and she had hardly thanked him, not daring to look up for fear he should read more than she wished him to in her eyes. How cold, how ungrateful, she had been! Oh, but for an hour back again, just to tell him. And she paced restlessly up and down the room. She could not weep, the shock had been too overpowering. All that she could do was to move restlessly about, listen to the regular ticking of the clock, and watch its gilt hands travel slowly on.

It was growing dusk. She could see from her window the myriad red and green lights of the

cabs zigzag slowly down the Champs Elysées to the Place de la Concorde. Where could her aunt be? Could she have heard the awful news, and gone to make further inquiries?

Just then the bell rang.

"Thank God," she thought, "Aunt Walters, at last." She rushed to the door, and saw Reginald Loring in the act of handing a very wet and dripping umbrella to Nanette, who was staring at him with awe-struck eyes, as at one risen from the dead.

Helen stood riveted to the spot, and then, with a gasp, for the first time in her life, fainted dead away.

When she recovered her senses, she found herself lying on a couch in the salon, and Reginald leaning anxiously over her, Nanette hovering in the background.

The use she made of her recovered faculties, much to Loring's consternation, was to burst into tears. His first impulse was to call Nanette; his next, to do just the opposite, and send her as far away as possible, and then to clasp Helen in his arms and kiss her pale face passionately.

"It is 'yes'?" he whispered. "I'm two days before my time."

"Ah!" she said, piteously, "how can you joke? If you only knew what I have suffered. But where were you? What was it all about?"

There was a ring of proprietorship in Helen's voice that filled his foolish young soul with pride and vainglory. Remember, he was only just engaged.

Meekly he hastened to reply:

"It all lies in a nutshell. On my way home, I met Dick Curtis—you remember Dick, poor fellow. Well, he was looking like the very dickens; he asked me to go with him, and have a talk about his affairs. In fact, he made a clean breast of it. He'd been gambling, and was head over ears in debt. I staid at his rooms all night, helping him straighten matters; and, this morning, took the repentant prodigal down to his family at Versailles, where I left him enjoying his minced veal prodigiously. Of course, with my usual luck, I missed the train. It never occurred to me that that blessed booby of mine would take it into his precious head to give the alarm, and frighten my little girl; but then, perhaps, Helen, had it not been for him, I shouldn't be the blissful idiot I am now. I'll bless Harris to the end of my days."

"No," said Helen, with a faint smile, "not Harris. It was the police sergeant—he had so many buttons!"

And Reginald was sufficiently happy to include even that personage in his gratitude.